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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001169

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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

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SUBJECT: A/S FRAZER'S MAY 29 MEETING WITH NIGERIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

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Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: A/S Frazer met on May 29 with representatives of civil society groups that had been involved in the 2007 elections. While the participants disagreed amongst themselves on many of the issues surrounding the elections, they agreed that the Nigerian electorate had been, in effect, disenfranchised through an event in which votes were not even counted. Still, the groups had mixed feelings about a Yar'Adua presidency and appeared to be maintaining a hopeful approach tempered by low expectations. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) A/S Frazer met with representatives of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA), the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), and the Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE). While the NLC representative advocated more training for government officials and civil society, the ACE representative argued that training programs were not important. "It is not about democratic illiteracy," he said, but rather the "lack of political will." He said some civil society organizations had been "coopted" by international donors and urged to give training to government officials. Others concurred that accepting foreign funding required them to buy into the programs proposed by donors rather than working on practical steps to move Nigeria's elections forward.

THE APRIL ELECTIONS

13. (C) All groups agreed that the April 2007 elections were Nigeria's "worst ever" and assigned the blame to "shifty state executives," a "lack of strong leadership" inside and outside government, and a ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) that is "unnecessarily assertive and unreasonably greedy." Still, the TMG representative said, in spite of a bad voters register and bad candidates, people tried to vote. ACE agreed that the people wanted to vote to hold representatives accountable.

14. (C) There was a difference of opinion as to whether the

Independent National Election Commission (INEC) Chairman Maurice Iwu was merely incompetent or complicit in the deeply flawed polling, but all agreed that he was ultimately responsible for the lapses in the electoral process. The NBA representative said that INEC never seriously addressed issues from the 2003 elections, probably because there was no plan to hold elections until the collapse of the "third-term agenda." All agreed, though, that "no law could have protected the country from the April events" since the national leadership had already determined to "ignore the law" and control the process.

THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

15. (C) The TMG representative expressed her concern about the future of Nigerian democracy, saying that this election had only proved that Nigeria's elite cares little about it. She said that while most people view the Nigerian electorate as apathetic, the opposite is really the case. "Nigerians are angry and frustrated," she said. She posited that Nigerians are willing to vote for "the right candidates" but that it was impossible for good candidates to be nominated in a rigged process. The group pointed out that the disadvantage faced by opposition parties stemmed from the "state's use of overwhelming resources, its flouting of court orders and its control of the security services to support PDP partisans."

16. (C) "The elections on April 14th were robbery, and on April 21st, no one came out," the TMG representative said. She averred that INEC's allegiance "is to the ruling party and not to the country." The NLC representative blamed the violence during the elections on the "manipulations of the Presidency." According to the NBA, the current system will not enable the Nigerian people to hold officials

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accountable, since they had not been elected in a credible polling. The TMG representative pointed out that until the cost-benefit ratio for those rigging elections is changed, there will be no chance for democracy in Nigeria.

THE WAY FORWARD

17. (C) All agreed that the imbalance in the power relationship between the "ruled and the rulers" is too great to overcome domestically, and they suggested greater international support to enable civil society to correct the balance. The ACE representative also said that the time for blaming "the system" is past and that it is necessary instead to blame individuals for their failures, a position endorsed by the NLC representatives. TMG pointed out that rigging "gets better" with each election. NBA said that in this election, there is no way to trace back control of the ballots or results, a problem that will hinder the tribunal process.

18. (C) The NLC representatives said that the international community's weak response would "dignify" the April election. ACE agreed but conceded that the international community would necessarily engage with the government in power. "Nigerians have a role as well," he stated. He suggested that if Nigerians were "in the streets," the international response would have been stronger. He also said that the international community still has a role to play to help empower Nigeria's citizens. He suggested a "forty percent solution": while normal relations continue and cooperation on many issues moves ahead (50 to 60 percent of international relations), the international community should also ensure that the Nigerian government was not rewarded for the embarrassing election through appointments to international positions, invitations to

certain conferences and other measures (the remaining 40 percent).

¶9. (C) They all suggested that with the consolidation of Nigeria as virtually a PDP one-party state, the government "has no incentive to reform without external pressure." "While only the Nigerian people can force reforms on the government, they cannot do it without international support," he concluded.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) While their opinions and descriptions varied, the core position of these groups was that the 2007 elections were Nigeria's worst, and that addressing the most egregious results and instituting reform are crucial to Nigeria's future. None of the groups gave any indication of planning activities for the immediate future, and it is unclear whether they intend to embark on further mass demonstrations. Still, all the groups seem to be anticipating a Yar'Adua presidency with an element of hopefulness, and were anxious to see how the new President's initiatives would be implemented. This hopefulness, however, was tempered by a dose of skepticism over the prospects of a manipulated and divisive mandate transforming itself into an open and inclusive presidency.

¶11. (U) A/S Frazer cleared this cable.
CAMPBELL